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SUBJECT: AFTER BASAYEV

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires a.i. Daniel A. Russell. Reason 1.4 (b, d)

Summary  
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11. (C) Shamil Basayev leaves behind questions about the future direction of Chechnya, the future direction of the North Caucasus, and future prospects for terrorism, extremism, and militant Jihadism in the region. With no unifying enemy, the leadership of Chechnya is beginning to show rifts. Moscow is reviewing its policy of unconditional support for Kadyrov. Meanwhile, there is no indication that Moscow will change in its support throughout the North Caucasus for local leaders noted for their corruption and excessive use of force. Though Basayev's "brand" helped raise funds, it had already become a liability to militant Jihadis. They are likely to emerge with better organization. Amnesties and attempts to lure Chechen leaders back may have some effect, but probably not with the Jihadis. Basayev's butchery and al-Qaeda links constrained U.S. and European policies towards Chechnya within the context of terrorism. His departure is an opportunity to broaden our approach to include cooperation with Russia in economic, social and human rights programs to protect the North Caucasus against the still-present danger of extremism. End Summary.

12. (C) Shamil Basayev disappeared in the early hours of July 10, after the explosion of a truck filled with weapons and ammunition several kilometers from the Ingush capital of Magas. The ocean of ink spilled since then has failed to clarify much beyond those few facts. We do not know whether the explosion was an accident, a special operation by the FSB, an assassination by rival terrorists, or even with certainty whether the body claimed to be Basayev's was really his. Government actions and pronouncements leave more questions than they answer. Leaks to the press sourced to the FSB have led to media speculation that crosses into fantasy. All that is clear is that Basayev is no longer active and a leader of the insurgency. This fact alone changes the landscape of the North Caucasus in many significant ways.

Chechen Politics  
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13. (C) Basayev was a unifying principle for the "Chechen" leadership (Note: to avoid confusion, we will use "Chechen" to refer to the pro-Russian forces in Grozny, and "Ichkerian" to refer to the insurgent movements that started with Dudayev. End Note). Only such an external threat could lead rivals such as Ramzan Kadyrov, Said-Magomed Kakiyev (leader of the "West" battalion) and Sulim Yamadayev (leader of the "East" battalion) to submerge their differences. The rivalries re-emerged even before Basayev's death, as he was losing power within the country. One observer reported from a June visit that businessmen in Chechnya who used to pay protection money to Basayev were now paying it instead to

Kadyrov. With Basayev out of the picture, the same observer told us, a "real opposition" to Kadyrov has taken shape, headed by Kakiyev and Yamadayev and under the titular leadership of President Alu Alkhanov. Only Alkhanov's "cowardice" (and uncertainty over Russia's reaction) kept the opposition from overt action. Such rifts will come to define Chechen internal politics for the near future.

¶4. (C) That said, a recovering Chechnya raises the boats of all militias and provides a deterrent to major rebellion. As one Chechen told us after his recent return from a family visit there, "Life would almost be normal there if it weren't for all the disappearances." Apparently, the economic improvement of the citizenry has allowed "a whole series of security services" to profit from kidnappings and to "disappear" business rivals, often under the guise of conducting anti-terrorist operations. But by and large, our Chechen friend said, the weakness of the guerrillas is allowing people's lives to improve rapidly.

#### Kremlin Politics

¶5. (C) Basayev's death leaves the Kremlin more room to maneuver in pursuit of its goals to keep Chechnya quiet and out of the international arena. On July 25 the "Commission for the Reconstruction of Chechnya" headed by DPM Medvedev sent a delegation to Grozny under Minister for Economic Development German Gref. The "inspection" provoked speculation that Moscow had second thoughts about letting Kadyrov push Alkhanov out of the Presidency and take it himself once the former turns 30, the statutory minimum.

¶6. (C) However, our Kremlin-linked interlocutors have closed

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ranks behind Kadyrov. Those who criticized him before now praise his "real accomplishments." Presidential Administration aide Aleksandr Machevskiy, who several months ago supported Presidential Representative Kozak over Kadyrov, now tells us that Kadyrov is a "great administrator in the Asiatic mode... these are Muslims, and a strong man like Kadyrov is needed to keep them in line. You Americans," he advised, "need to find someone like him for Iraq." Machevskiy's crude words reflect the Kremlin's mindset on dealing with Muslims. A Dagestani professor at the Academy of Sciences described to us "Russian" views on how to deal with Muslims in terms eerily similar to Machevskiy's. The professor stressed that those views are inapplicable to the North Caucasus. They do, however, favor figures like Kadyrov. It is no coincidence that Kadyrov is spearheading the charge for a Putin third term -- it butters up Kadyrov's patron, and if the campaign works it keeps him around for a long time to come.

¶7. (C) Some sources believe the praise for Kadyrov is akin to the kiss Mafiosi receive before they are rubbed out. They say the Kremlin believes Kadyrov, without Basayev as an opponent, will turn his attentions outward in order to get all the Chechens to line up behind him and paper over the internal rifts; this outward focus will lead Kadyrov to cross some red lines. Kadyrov is indeed trying to throw his weight around in the North Caucasus (see below, para. 14). On balance, however, we judge that the Kremlin's inner circle considers stability in Chechnya still too fragile to survive an out-and-out power struggle, and will keep backing Kadyrov. Some interlocutors believe Kadyrov is still needed because his fighters -- mostly ex-rebels -- would disappear back into the mountains without his personal guarantee of immunity from prosecution. Other observers dispute this and claim that Kadyrov's forces would follow anyone who pays them. Assassination is always a possibility, but in that event the Kremlin would probably unite its weight behind one potential candidate -- probably Sulim Yamadayev or Kadyrov's constant companion and security chief Adam Delimkhanov -- to avoid a protracted power struggle.

18. (C) Both Kadyrov and the Kremlin are trying to follow up Basayev's death by neutralizing prominent Ichkerian officials abroad. On July 23 Magomed Khanbiyev -- former Ichkerian "Defense Minister" and now a loyal member of Kadyrov's Parliament -- was sent to Baku, presumably to lure back his brother Umar, Ichkerian "Health Minister" and one of the most prominent holdouts. Chechen businessman and former presidential candidate Malik Saydullayev, known to be close to the FSB, told a contact of ours he was opening negotiations to get Ichkerians to return, but refused to say who his targets were. On July 18, President Putin personally asked Tony Blair to deport Ichkerian "Foreign Minister" Ahmad Zakayev, who has political asylum in the UK. The Russians followed up with a formal indictment and extradition request eight days later. (Comment: Zakayev's importance to the Kremlin appears to lie primarily in his ties to exiled oligarch Boris Berezovskiy. This, rather than his Ichkerian record, probably explains Russia's doggedness in seeking his extradition. End Comment.) Machevskiy warned us that Russian services might take action -- "as we did with Yandarbiyev" -- against some overseas leaders, including Zakayev and Movladi Udugov, the propagandist thought to be in the Persian Gulf. (Ichkerian "President" Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev was assassinated in Qatar on February 13 2004. Russian agents were arrested and convicted of the crime.) Success in luring back prominent Ichkerians would be a political bonus for both the Kremlin and Kadyrov, and would assist Russia's goal of taking Chechnya out of the international political arena. These figures, however, have no influence over the fighters.

19. (C) To encourage fighters to lay down their arms, FSB Chief Patrushev announced an amnesty on July 15. The picture he and others have painted was of scattered cells, mostly leaderless, that could liquidate themselves voluntarily or be liquidated by the security forces. Press reporting and the public statements of Chechen officials indicate few fighters are lured by the prospect. The only guarantee fighters might consider is a personal one from Kadyrov, not a federal amnesty. Still, Chechen officials publicly urged Patrushev to extend the amnesty beyond the August 1 deadline. The new deadline is September 30. Some interlocutors have suggested to us that a realistic goal would be to encourage remaining groups (including the large one led by Ichkerian "President" Doku Umarov) to escape the country over the southern mountain passes.

#### Regional Hopes and Fears

10. (C) Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria quickly followed

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Patrushev's lead and announced amnesties for surrendering guerrillas. We have seen no indication of response from the fighters. In Dagestan, alienated youths have been waging a war with the security forces. The Duma Member from Makhachkala told us they have one by one assassinated every member of the Dagestani MVD's counter-terrorism unit. Given that implacable hostility and the power struggles shaking the republic's elite, fighters might well conclude they are safer up in the mountains. In Kabardino-Balkaria, despite some outreach by President Kanokov (dismissed as "cosmetic concessions" by one expert in North Caucasus Islam), the aftermath of the extremist attack on Nalchik in October 2005 has produced great anger: authorities still refuse to release the bodies of the dead. It is widely presumed that the authorities want to hide evidence that the men were tortured and killed after arrest, rather than during the actual attack. That will probably deter fighters from surrendering.

11. (C) Ingush President Zyazikov could be the biggest individual loser from Basayev's presumed death. The explosion took place close to the Ingush capital in a village

where a number of police and MVD officials live. Our interlocutors take it as a given that Basayev had infiltrated most of the regional security services, and that many security officials were in fact sympathetic to Basayev or on his payroll. The rumors about Ingushetia are more explicit: that Basayev had protection from the senior levels of the Ingush government. Ruslan Khasbulatov told us last month that Basayev had a wide acquaintance in the FSB and its successors from the early 1990s, when he was trained by and worked for the KGB. The suspicions of Basayev's contacts could extend to Zyazikov, an ex-KGB officer.

¶12. (C) Aside from that potential personnel reshuffle, however, it appears to be business as usual in the North Caucasus republics -- and that means the breeding ground for Jihadi extremists will continue to be fertile. Unemployment, alienation, lack of hope, corruption and heavy-handed reliance on brutal security services appear to be as prevalent as ever. For example, on April 25 residents of southern Dagestan's Dokuzpare district gathered peacefully to protest the corruption of the district chief. He had been appointed by the previous president, Magomedali Magomedov, and they thought the new President, Mukhu Aliyev, would be receptive to their complaints. The district chief called in two battalions of security troops, who fired on the demonstrators, killing three.

¶13. (C) Attitudes towards dealing with non-official Islam have not changed. At a recent MGIMO conference, a speaker from Kabardino-Balkaria declared, "The terrorists go through three stages: first, they say they just want to worship freely. Second, they say they want to live according to Shari'a law. Third, they take up arms to impose an Islamic state. We know how to deal with them when they reach the third stage, but we can't let them get that far. We have to stop them in the first stage." The speaker's philosophy was clearly shared by former Kabardino-Balkarian Minister of Internal Affairs Shogenov who last year closed mosques and deployed heavy police surveillance and harassment to hinder free worship. The result was the terrorist attack on Nalchik of October, 2005. Kabardino-Balkarian President Kanokov has since sacked Shogenov. However, such attitudes are clearly still strong in the republic. Religious repression and economic desperation keep the underlying conditions for terrorism in place.

¶14. (C) The regional governments appear to be preoccupied with the growing regional strength of Kadyrov and his willingness to throw his weight around. His forces have increasingly been carrying out operations in Ingushetia. He appears to be spreading into Dagestan as well. Not having been in on the death of Basayev on July 10, three days later Kadyrov announced a major operation to eliminate a large band of "Avars, Arabs and Turks" infiltrating from Dagestan, which he identified as the current source of terrorism in the Caucasus. On July 21 the Makhachkala newspaper "Chernovik" published an alternative version of events based on the identified "terrorists" and interviews with their families. In "Chernovik's" reportage, two men (from Kadyrov's security services, the paper implied) recruited 18 youths and boys, some as young as 13, from ethnic Chechen-Akkin from villages around Khasavyurt. The escorts led them into Chechnya. Only the two escorts and three older boys were armed. When they crossed into Chechnya, Kadyrov's forces were waiting in ambush and machine gunned them all -- except for the escorts, who disappeared, and a 13 year-old boy who had lagged behind and escaped with a bullet in his leg. True or not, this version reflects Dagestani distrust of Kadyrov and the perception that his cynicism and butchery are unlimited. Chechen calls for the merger of several regions in the North

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Caucasus -- in which the Chechens would be the largest single ethnic group -- are viewed by other ethnic groups as more evidence of Kadyrov's aggressive ambitions.

## The Fighters: Prisoners of the Mountains

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¶15. (C) Basayev's departure will accelerate changes within the guerrilla forces themselves. "President" Doku Umarov, leader of the only remaining sizable group, is also the last of the generation of commanders who came into prominence during the first Chechen war, 1994-96. A new generation of fighters is taking over, one that has no memory of normal life and ignores Ichkerian separatism in favor of Jihadi religious extremism. At the same time, even before Basayev's death, his "brand" had become less effective in garnering support and funding from international Jihadi organizations and Gulf funding. The public relations disaster of Beslan put a halt to spectacular terrorist actions, and funders of jihad turned to more attractive investments elsewhere. In recent months internal funding also dried up, as Kadyrov successfully muscled in on Basayev's protection racket (see above, para. 3). This put a great strain on Basayev's organization, which was forced to devote enormous resources just to protect him. With his departure, the organization will revert to a more efficient cell-based network, the Academy of Sciences professor predicted. Its more modest needs could be financed through the usual bank robbery and narcotics trade.

¶16. (C) The end state after the dust settles is therefore likely to be a network of Jihadi extremist cells throughout the North Caucasus, in touch with each other. Though they will seek contact with al-Qaida or other international Jihadi extremist organizations, Basayev's death may have marginalized these groups in world terrorism terms. The poverty of the region, combined with the conspicuous consumption of a corrupt few and the brutality of the security services will keep a constant flow of recruits. However, training and capacity to carry out significant operations are another matter.

Implications for the U.S.

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¶17. (C) The disappearance of the Basayev "brand logo" could lead to new opportunities for U.S. policy on Chechnya and the North Caucasus as a whole. There will still be terrorism, but Chechnya is becoming more secure and marginal as an arena for international Jihadis. There will still be human rights abuses, but large-scale atrocities by Russian Federal forces are becoming less likely. The issues that do remain salient are the economic and social factors that drive youth towards extremism: lack of opportunity, isolation, the corruption and conspicuous consumption of new elites, and 19th century Russian attitudes towards dealing with Muslim populations, including excessive reliance on force and repression. These factors continue to render the North Caucasus fertile soil for militant Jihadism brandishing the flag of social justice and freedom of religion.

¶18. (C) Our goal should be to help Russia overcome these problems, while recognizing that the Russians themselves bear the primary responsibility, and that human rights concerns will continue to limit direct cooperation with figures such as Kadyrov. Our current modest programs -- aside from the still-needed humanitarian focus -- are a start towards ending the isolation of the region and its youth. We should focus our efforts on three areas: programs that increase knowledge of how to use resources from the outside world, improve agricultural practices, and help the regions compete for Russian domestic investment capital; programs that mitigate youth isolation and provide channels other than Jihadist extremism for youthful desires to belong, to make a difference, and to achieve social justice; and efforts -- both through assistance and through direct dialogue and cooperation with the Government of Russia -- to pull Russia into the project throughout Western societies of re-evaluating how we deal with Muslims as part of our own societies and in Muslim countries. This last set of efforts will be the most difficult, since Russian attitudes towards Muslims took hundreds of years to solidify and will not

change overnight. This is at heart a human rights issue in which dialogue is the key tool. It is clear that the West does not have all the answers, either. However, we recognize that we have a problem -- and there are some Russians who recognize that they have a problem, too. In strengthening and engaging with those voices, we can make both Russia and ourselves more secure.

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